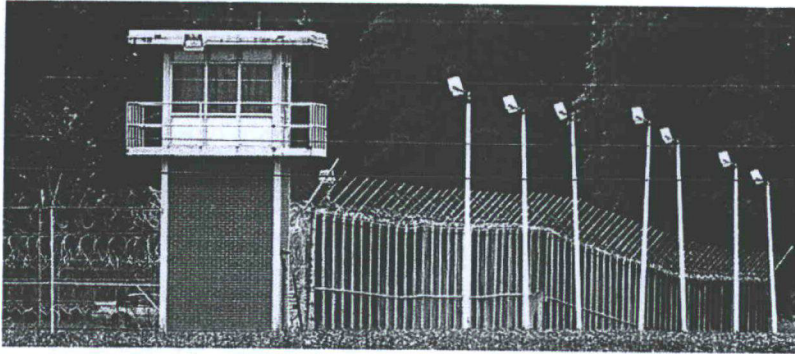


Ohio Innocence Project seeks release of convicted wife-killer



James Parsons is seeking to be released from prison after 22 years for the slaying of his wife, Barbara. The Ohio Innocence Project says he has been convicted of a crime he didn't commit. (*The Plain Dealer*)



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NORWALK, Ohio – A husband convicted in 1993 of killing his wife is seeking to be released from prison, claiming prosecutors withheld evidence of a forensic expert's erratic work record.

James Parsons, 77, has leukemia and congestive heart disease and has been treated at **the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center**. He asked a judge Thursday for a hearing involving evidence that his lawyer says could overturn his conviction for the slaying of his wife, Barbara.

An attorney with **the Ohio Innocence Project** said in court records that prosecutors failed to tell Parsons' defense attorney, Cleveland lawyer Paul Mancino, that the forensic expert was forcibly removed from her laboratory two months before Parsons' trial for contentious dealings with co-workers.

In documents filed in Huron County Common Pleas Court, Parsons' attorney, Donald Caster, also attacked the expert's findings, saying they were based on "junk science."

He urged **Judge James Conway** to "correct the injustice wrought upon the Parsons' family more than two decades ago." Parsons has maintained his innocence.

Barbara Parsons, 41, died in the bedroom of her Norwalk home in 1981 after someone wielding a large, heavy object beat her 15 times in the head. James Parsons claimed he was away from his home that day, working at his auto-repair business.

Twelve years later, in 1993, authorities arrested her husband and accused him of murder. The charge was filed after authorities resubmitted evidence to state crime analysts. Months later, a Huron County jury spent four hours deliberating before finding Parsons guilty. He was sentenced to 15 years to life, and he has spent 22 years in prison.

Caster said in the document that Parsons' conviction hinged on the testimony of a forensic scientist named G. Michele Yezzo from the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation.

During Parsons' trial, Yezzo testified about bloodstains found on evidence and the patterns they left behind. Specifically, she used chemical enhancements to find that the stains had markings linked to a large mechanic's tool. Authorities seized a similar tool, known as a breaker bar, in a car James Parsons had sold to a friend.

"When she came to the key evidence upon which Mr. Parsons' conviction would be based, she abandoned the photography," Caster wrote. "Indeed, Ms. Yezzo's decisions in this case are more than troubling."

"They are indefensible. By using chemical enhancement and choosing not to photograph the results, she effectively prevented any other scientist from verifying or replicating her work."

But Caster said prosecutors withheld information from Mancino about Yezzo. In 1989, a state supervisor wrote in a memo that Yezzo's "findings and conclusions regarding the truth maybe suspect. She will stretch the truth to satisfy a department," according to Caster's filing, which quotes from the memo.

Caster said in documents that prosecutors knew that Yezzo was escorted from her office. Caster said in an interview that an assistant county prosecutor at the time, Greg Shell, called Yezzo at work prior to the trial to prepare her for testifying.

He learned that Yezzo wasn't at work, as she had been placed on administrative leave, according to the filing and Caster. Yezzo had been at home after being escorted from the office following a work-related incident, according to the filing.

Yezzo wrote about the prosecutor's call in a note to a human resources employee at her office. The note, which Caster attached to the filing, was dated July 27, 1993; Parsons went to trial two weeks later.

"On 7/19/1993, I received a call from Huron County Assistant Prosecutor Greg Shell, who explained that he needed my testimony related to a homicide trial in August," Yezzo wrote. "I explained that he would have to talk to the BCI about any matters concerning his case and that I could only be available through the bureau."

In an interview, Mancino said he knew nothing about Yezzo's issues at work. Had he known, he would have used it in his cross-examination of Yezzo, the attorney said.

Yezzo declined to comment Thursday. Shell, who handled the case with then-county Prosecutor Russell Leffler, died in 2008. Leffler has left office. He could not be reached Thursday.

Huron County Prosecutor Daivia Kasper said she received a copy of the filing but had yet to read it and could not comment.

It is unclear whether the case could affect other cases that Yezzo handled. A spokesman for the Ohio Attorney General's office declined to comment.

Sherry Parsons, the younger daughter of James and Barbara, said she and her sister are steadfastly behind her father.

"He should never have been in there," she said. "I haven't given up on this, and I'm not going to, ever. I just hope we're at the end."

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